

Launceston Girls' Home

1921 – 1989

Details

Launceston Girls' Home replaced the Launceston Girls' Industrial School in 1921. It was run by a volunteer ladies' committee and an advisory council of five men. The Home accommodated girls between the ages of two and 16. It closed in 1989.

Launceston Girls' Home was a non-denominational Protestant home. Its new name was an attempt to shake off the image of a charitable institution and the social stigma associated with that.

It was a certified children's Home under the Children of the State Act 1918.

In 1921, the girls aged between five and 14 began attending state school instead of being taught in the Home. Girls over 14 were called 'home girls'. They did not go to school but worked at the Home, training as domestic servants. They changed their duties every month so that they understood every aspect of them. At the age of 16, they went out to work. In 1927, nearly all the girls were under 14, and therefore at school, which meant that none of them were available to do domestic work. To ensure that it was done, instead of going out to work, two of the older girls stayed at the Home, which paid them wages, to do it. When girls left the Home to go into domestic service, they received a 'special outfit' to wear.

There were new extensions to the building in 1921. A couple of years later, the Committee planned to add a babies' wing to the school. By 1927, it had not done so because it was 'a very big undertaking'. The idea never did come to fruition. This meant that the youngest child had to be at least two years old.

Some of the activities mentioned in newspaper articles included joining the Brownies or Girl Guides, attending classes such as eurhythmics, going on Sunday School picnics, attending afternoon teas organised for the girls, and visiting the Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys where some girls probably had brothers. The 'home girls' went to the Youth Club at Patons and Baldwins. All the girls assisted with the Home's annual fundraising fair. They had annual holidays on the North or North-West coast. Public donations paid for holidays.

In 1936, a *Launceston Examiner* reporter visited the Home.

He wrote that in winter, the girls wore brown flannel dresses and berets on Sundays. For school they wore a tunic and blouse.

The reporter described the work done by the 'home girls':

The fact that the girls are thoroughly trained in all domestic work was illustrated during a visit to the home one day last week.

Everywhere were floors and stairs and steps spotless and shining, snowy beds were neatly made, the dinner was cooking (such big utensils), and in the sunny asphalt yard and in the garden some of the laundry had been placed to air.

In another sunny spot in the yard some of the girls were making jam – in a copper for small boilers are of little use in this big household.

If the girls broke something, it came out of their wages, which were one shilling a week.

According to the reporter, the girls got up at seven am and made their own beds except for the youngest ones – the older girls helped with those. After breakfast, they went to school. They also helped with odd jobs, darning, and mending clothes. Each bed showed some 'individuality', for instance, Shirley Temple posters, swimming certificates or religious texts.

In the dining room, there was a piano, wireless, and small library. A member of staff supervised the girls at mealtimes except on Sundays, when they had their meals alone. Most of the vegetables came from the garden. Between meals a brown cloth covered the tables.

When a girl went into domestic service, she received some of her wages as pocket money and her employer banked the rest or used it for clothes. The employer had to agree to the new clothes and was supposed to supervise the purchase. When a girl left the home she took two nightdresses, three vests, three pairs of bloomers, two petticoats, two morning frocks, one afternoon frock, one best frock, two hats, two pairs of shoes, one pair of slippers, three coloured aprons, a brush and comb, a toothbrush, a washer, and three or four pairs of stockings.

By 1941, most girls attended Glen Dhu School. Formerly, they had been to Charles Street School.

On 26 March 1949 at about three am, a fire destroyed the outbuildings of the Home. The occupants knew nothing about it until a neighbour on the way to work woke them up. The fire brigade saved the dormitories.

In May 1950, the Home launched an appeal for funds because it was losing £1500 a year. The Deputy-Chairman of the Board said that there were 35 girls in the home who each cost £3 a week to look after. Two thirds of the children were wards of state for which the Home received some money from the Social Services Department. The Home received the Child Endowment from the Commonwealth government. However, there was still a gap of over £1 a week. The Board also sought contributions towards a building fund. The Deputy-Chairman said that 'the Board is doing its best but we have been the Cinderella of institutions in the North'.

It seems likely that the Home was dilapidated. In 1948, a state cabinet minister had described it as being "like a scene out of old Dickens". However, the Deputy Chairman said that conditions had improved 'vastly' with £900 spent on repairs.

By 1950, the emphasis on domestic service as employment for the girls after they left the Home had gone. The Deputy-Chairman said that the Board was now anxious to place them in situations that suited their talents: 'There was no real stigma attaching to domestic service, but some of the girls were eligible and competent to take their place in other community spheres and the board wanted to encourage that selective ideal'.

In a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, a former ward of state described her time at Launceston Girls' Home in the late 1940s:

At the girls' home, there were three dormitories, the nursery, the junior and the senior ones. I stayed in this home until I was 8. I was rebellious and kept running away. I would go to the park near where my Dad lived

as I thought my Mum would come...and I could see her, but I never did. When I ran away, Matron...always used to find me in the park.

My mother wasn't allowed to visit us at the home, as they thought it would upset us too much...

At the home, we went to Glendhu School in Launceston. I remember feeling different because we had different uniforms and were referred to as the 'home girls' and were on the 'free list'. There was also a bit of teasing from the other girls. There was one teacher there...who was a lovely person. She would give us treats because we never had any. I used to have trouble with my tables, and Matron...would help me.

Some of us girls wrote a poem about being home girls that we used to sing. It went like this:

*The girl home girls
The girl home girls
The girl home girls are we
We're always up to mischief
Where ever we may be
Some think we are cranky
They make a big mistake
Where ever the girl home girls are
We're always wide-awake
Bread and fat for breakfast
Bread and fat for tea
A lump of bread as big as your head
As stale as it can be...*

I was quite naughty at the Home and would often get locked in a room, but I never went hungry as there was a gap under the door and my sister...would push bread and jam under the door.

One carer at the Home...was often cruel to us girls. She would pick on them, especially on my sister...I remember her beating [my sister] one day and she had bruises all over her. But she was sacked for doing this.

Launceston Girls' Home closed in 1989. The building no longer exists.

National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse

In 2021, the Tasmanian government has agreed to be a funder of last resort for this institution. This means that although the institution is now defunct, it is participating in the National Redress Scheme, and the government has agreed to pay the institution's share of costs of providing redress to a person (as long as the government is found to be equally responsible for the abuse a person experienced).

More info

Chronology

- Launceston Girls' Industrial School (1877 - 1921)
 - **Launceston Girls' Home (1921 – 1989)**

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Listen to the children: review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children, Ombudsman Tasmania \(2003 - 2006\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys \(1921 - 1973\)](#)
Joint outings were sometimes organised for the girls at Launceston Girls' Home and the boys at the Northern Tasmanian Home for Boys.

Related Places

- [Cape Barren Island Reserve \(1881 - 1951\)](#)
Launceston Girls' Home probably received children from Cape Barren Island Reserve.

Resources

- [We are forty-two: a visit to the Launceston Girls' Home](#), Examiner, 17 June 1936
- [Engrossed](#), The Mercury, 9 April 1949
- [Joy was spontaneous](#), The Mercury, 26 May 1950
- [Holiday at beach](#), Advocate, 12 January 1954
- [Enjoying the beach](#), Advocate, 15 January 1952
- [Reading](#), Examiner, 7 August 1952
- [And the first to show out is](#), The Mercury, 15 August 1952
- [Club gift](#), Examiner, 12 December 1950
- [Occasion was too much for twins](#), The Mercury, 13 August 1954
- [Flowers for Margot](#), Examiner, 8 September 1949
- [Holiday in Ulverstone](#), Advocate, 11 January 1952
- [Playmates](#), Advocate, 16 January 1952
- [New Australians on home staff](#), Advocate, 11 January 1951
- [Launceston Girls' Home: fifty years in existence](#), The Mercury, 4 July 1928
- Davis, Lorraine, [Submission No 182 to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care](#), 2004

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- [Admission Registers \(Primary\), Charles Street School \(1902 - 1982\)](#)
 - [Admission Register, Glen Dhu Infant School \(1925 - 1991\)](#)
 - [Admission Register, Glen Dhu State School \(1928 - 1975\)](#)
 - [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
 - [General Correspondence-Hospital and Health Administration \(1932 - 1987\)](#)
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